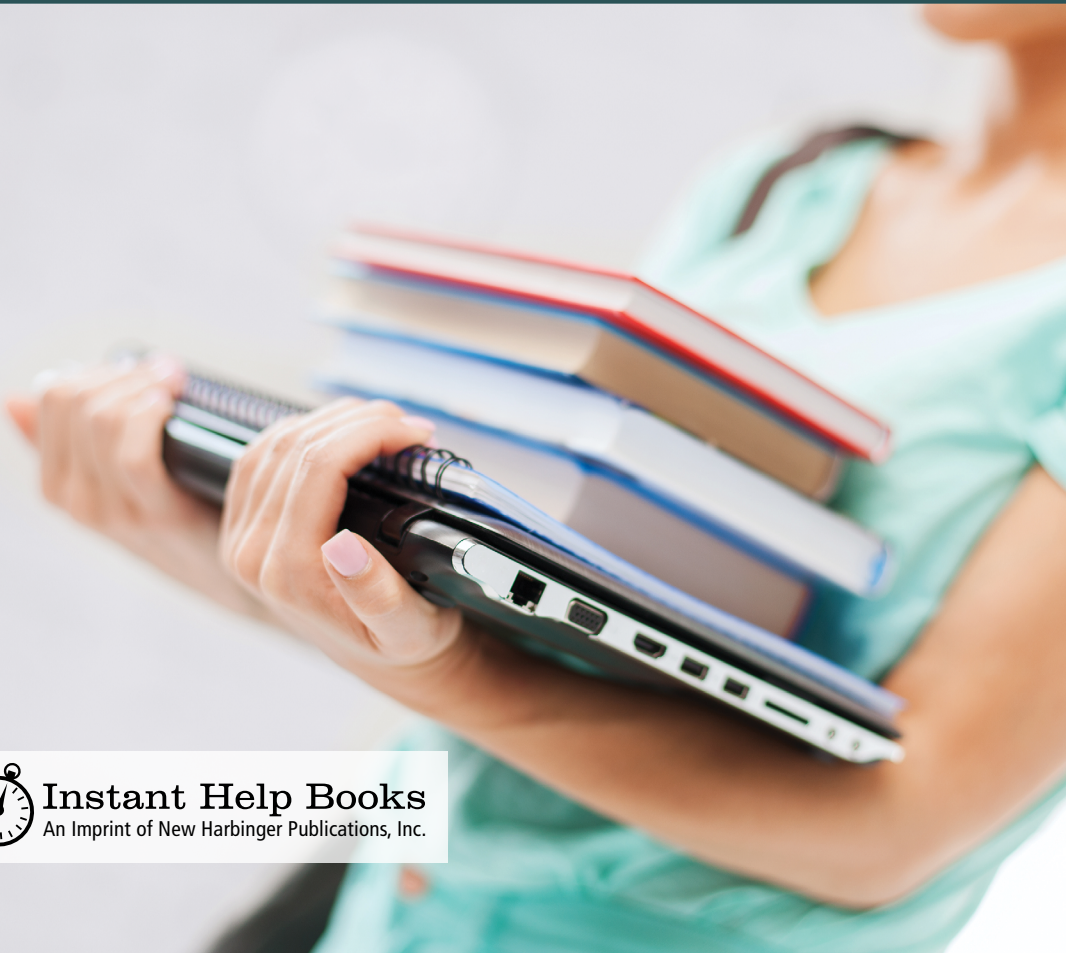


6 skills every teen needs to survive high school



Instant Help Books
An Imprint of New Harbinger Publications, Inc.

6 Skills Every Teen Needs to Survive High School



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Introduction

Let's face it. Life is no walk in the park. And sometimes it's particularly difficult. The teen years is one of those times for many people.

There is no other time in life when you will face the level and types of changes and challenges you do when you're a teenager. It's a special and strange era when you are caught between two developmental stages—you're not exactly a child anymore, but you're also not quite yet an adult.

This is why for some teenagers high school becomes a kind of psychological battle field. Social challenges, getting involved in serious relationships for the first time, the pressure to succeed in school and in sports, the increasing amount of extra-curricular activities young people are expected to undertake (not to mention the hormonal changes teens experience) all add up and can lead to stress, self-doubt, interpersonal conflict, intense mood swings, and the feeling of being overwhelmed and even lost.

But there's good news! Teens don't have to go it alone. There are skills anyone can learn that will not only help them survive high school but succeed in life.

The skills outlined in this free guide are more than simple tips or tricks to help teens manage high school better. They represent some of the most well-researched techniques to come out of modern psychology. Each comes directly from our *Instant Help Books for Teens*—an imprint we at New Harbinger developed to provide teens the psychological and emotional support they need. The books in this series are written by psychologists who specialize in working with teenagers.

The exercises in the pages that follow are designed to help teens

- Let go of anxiety and self-doubt
- Feel calm in the face of everyday problems
- Develop a positive self-image

- Calm intense emotions (including anger)
- Resolve conflicts and get along with others
- Deal with the daily drama without getting wrapped up in it

But these exercises will actually serve teens on a far greater level. By integrating these skills into their lives now, young people will find they rely on them throughout their lives to manage their emotions when interpersonal conflicts, problems at work, and the other difficulties we all face inevitably arise.

We at New Harbinger pride ourselves on producing evidence-based self-help that is designed to help those who need it most. This free guide is an extension of that mission. It is our hope teens not only find it helpful, but that they practice the techniques outlined so they can find greater balance and happiness in their lives.

Skill #1: Follow Your Breath,

from *The Anxiety Workbook for Teens*
by Lisa M. Schab, LCSW

Our thoughts are the main cause of our anxiety. When our minds are racing from thought to thought, commitment to commitment, fear to fear, they signal our bodies to become tense. Keeping our minds focused on stressful thoughts, or just on too many thoughts at once, can keep our anxiety level high.

Focusing your thoughts on something simple and peaceful will have the opposite effect, and your breath is an ideal point of focus. Left to its natural rhythm, your breath will settle into a very peaceful cadence. It will be balanced and regular, slow and deep—much like it is when you are in a peaceful sleep.

Focusing on your breath is a simple way to bring yourself out of an anxious state and back to peace. It is a tool you always carry with you, so it can be used in any situation, at any time of night or day, wherever you are, whomever you are with, whatever you are doing. You can stop and focus on your breath when you feel yourself getting anxious because you are having an argument with your friend, having a hard time understanding a math problem, getting ready for a job interview, talking with someone you are attracted to, or at any other time.

Putting your attention on your breath for just a minute or two during a time of high anxiety can help you to lower the anxiety and bring yourself back to a peaceful state. Focusing on your breath takes your mind off anxious thoughts and causes your breath to slow and deepen, bringing more oxygen to your body and relaxing it, bringing more oxygen to your mind and clearing it.

Directions

Try this exercise to learn how to focus on your breath.

Sit comfortably and close your eyes. Then simply put your attention on your breath. Notice where you feel it. Can you feel air moving in and out of your nostrils? Do you notice it raising and lowering your chest? Does your breath move all the way down into your abdomen when you inhale, or does it move only into your mouth or throat? You don't have to try to change your breathing or make your breath do anything special: your goal is just to find it and follow it and see how it moves as it flows in and out of your body. Continue to follow it for a couple of minutes or for as long as you are comfortable.

Since we are not usually used to paying attention to our breath, this exercise may not come easily at first. Some people say they cannot even locate their breath. If that happens to you, try holding your breath for a few seconds and then releasing it. Stopping breathing and then starting again can make the presence of your breath more obvious to you.

You may have to practice this exercise a few times until it becomes easy to find and follow your breath. Once you can do it more easily, you will not have to close your eyes anymore. You will be able to focus on your breath while you are in class, at a party, in the shower, or eating dinner with your family. If you feel anxious, simply remembering to find your breath and put your attention on it will cause you to slow down and breathe more deeply and will lower your anxiety.

More to Do

Over the next day or two, practice paying attention to your breath at different times. Describe how fast or slow, shallow or deep, your breathing is when you are

_____ eating lunch

_____ in a hard class

_____ in an easy class

_____ watching TV

_____ talking on the phone

_____ riding in the car

_____ listening to music

_____ doing homework

_____ hanging out with friends

Name some situations in which it would be easy for you to focus on your breath without anyone noticing what you are doing.

Name some situations in which it might be harder to focus on your breath without anyone noticing what you are doing.

Name any anxious situations in which it could be helpful for you to focus on your breath.

Describe what happens to your anxiety level as you pay attention to your breath.

Deep Breathing

If you watch newborn babies breathe, you will notice that their stomachs rise and fall with each breath. That is because they are naturally breathing deeply and carrying their breath all the way down into their diaphragms. Babies have not yet learned to be stressed. As adults, we tend to inhale our breath into our nostrils, our throats, and sometimes down into our lungs. But rarely do we breathe so deeply that our abdomens move in and out. Most often, our anxious thoughts and hurried activities cause us to breathe using only the upper parts of our respiratory systems. Sometimes, when we are very stressed or in a rush, we may even hold our breath intermittently without realizing it.

Deeper breathing helps relieve anxiety by slowing down our heart rates, relaxing our muscles, and bringing more oxygen deep into our bodies and brains, nourishing our cells more completely and helping us think more clearly. When we are breathing deeply, we are physically less tense. We are also better able to remind ourselves to use positive and rational thinking skills instead of anxiety-producing self-messages and distorted thinking.

Directions

Before trying this breathing exercise, it is recommended that you complete the Following Your Breath activity above, which will give you practice in finding and following your breath.

Sit or lie down comfortably. Close your eyes so that you can better concentrate and block out distractions. Place your hand gently over your abdomen. Pretend that there is a round balloon in your abdomen, with the opening at the top, or closest to your lungs. Now inhale, and think about pulling your breath all the way down through your body, through the balloon opening and to the bottom of the balloon. As you inhale, let your abdomen rise to make room for your breath. Think about using this breath to fill your body with fresh air, filling the bottom of the balloon first, then the top, then completely filling your lungs from the bottom up.

When you are ready to exhale, gently press down on the bottom of your “balloon” and push the air out of your body from the bottom up, emptying the balloon first, then your lungs and chest.

Repeat this pattern slowly for several minutes, or until it starts to feel comfortable.

Breathing in this way may seem awkward at first. Some people even become anxious because they feel they cannot do it “right.” Understand that it is normal to start out feeling this way. It is something new that your body and mind aren’t used to. The more you do it, however, the more familiar it will become and the more you will be able to relax. Try to take your time and know that eventually you will get the hang of it. Don’t set yourself up for feeling anxious by trying to do it perfectly.

More To Do

Circle any of the following things that you noticed while you tried the breathing exercise:

breathing got deeper

felt stiff

felt awkward

mind wandered

heart rate slowed down

let go of tension

felt peaceful

felt sleepy

felt a little anxious

breathing got steadier

muscles relaxed

other _____

muscles twitched

Following is a list of situations in which people can use deep breathing to help them relieve anxiety. Circle those that have happened or might happen to you:

giving an oral report in class

going through a haunted house

taking a test

performing in athletics

performing in a recital

having a tense conversation
with a friend

going on a job interview

taking your driver's test

doing something new for the
first time

going on a date

jumping or diving off the high-
dive board

getting a lecture from
your parents

Now make a list of personal situations in your own life in which you could use deep breathing to help you relieve anxiety.

[Go here if you want to learn more about *The Anxiety Workbook for Teens* by Lisa M. Schab, LCSW.](#)

Skill #2: Become Mindful, from *The Mindful Teen* by Dzung X. VO, MD, FAAP

Stress will arise in your life, whether you want it to or not—but how you relate to it is totally up to you. Mindfulness can give you a powerful tool for increasing your resiliency and helping you rise above difficulty. You already know that life as a teen is stressful. The truth is that life as an adult is also stressful. Learning how to handle stress now, while you're young, can help you have a positive future as an adult. Mindfulness is something you can practice and use now and for the rest of your life. So why wait?

Shift out of Autopilot

Have you ever been so preoccupied that you weren't consciously aware of what you were actually doing? For example, have you ever walked from one class to another, and found that by the time you arrived you didn't even remember how you got there? Maybe you were busy checking your phone, or rushing just to get there on time, or thinking about what you needed to do later. And suddenly you "woke up" and realized where you were.

Perhaps you go through much of your life as if in a dream, mindlessly, without awareness. Your body may be in one place, and your mind may be somewhere else. We call this being "on autopilot," as if you are cruising through life automatically, robotically. We all have a strong tendency to let our autopilot take over as we go through our daily lives.

* *Mary's Story*

Mary said that she had been getting stressed out a lot by drama with her friends and drama with her family. Her stress was sometimes so severe that she got headaches and belly pain. She sometimes missed school because of it. She didn't know what she could do to handle her stress, and she felt hopeless.

At the start of the mindfulness course, Mary was skeptical. The main reason she had agreed to take the course was because her mother had pressured her to. But she decided, as she said, "I'm here now—I might as well give it a try. I'm already really stressed out—what do I have to lose?" So she tried some short formal mindfulness practices at home, like mindful breathing (which you'll learn in this chapter), sitting meditation, and the body scan. She also started to practice mindfulness informally—bringing that same present-moment, nonjudgmental awareness to activities like walking, sitting on the bus, and brushing her teeth.

By paying attention to her own life and her own stress, Mary said she was surprised to learn that she spent a lot of time on autopilot and that being on autopilot usually worsened her stress. At the end of the mindfulness course, Mary said, "Now I know how to handle stress and pain in a healthy way, and I do feel that it has helped me a lot...in many different situations."

Any time you are going through life on autopilot, you might take for granted all kinds of seemingly "ordinary" experiences. If you can shift out of autopilot and into a deep present-moment awareness, you can discover how extraordinary every moment of life can be. If you can be fully present, you can experience the miracle of being truly alive even while doing the simplest of activities, such as eating a raisin.

Try This! Eat a Raisin Mindfully

You can do this mindfulness practice using the instructions below or with the help of the recording (track 1) available at

<http://www.newharbinger.com/30802>.

Start by placing a single raisin on a table or plate in front of you. (If you are allergic to raisins, or if you don't have any raisins handy, you can substitute some other food that is easily available and that you have eaten before, like an orange, some peanuts, or even a piece of candy.)

Perhaps you have certain ideas about what a raisin is, what a raisin looks like, or what a raisin tastes like. Perhaps you like raisins, or perhaps you don't. For now, put all your ideas and expectations about raisins aside. For now, simply experience and explore this raisin as if you had never encountered a raisin before. Imagine that you're an alien and you've just arrived on Earth. You are very curious to explore new things about Earth, and today is your chance to find out what a raisin is all about. You are going to explore this raisin with all of your senses. You are going to be really curious about this particular, individual raisin in great detail and try to get to know it.

Before you do anything with the raisin, start by coming fully to the present moment. Tell yourself you have nothing else to do and nowhere to go right now. Take three breaths in and out. As best you can, just bring your full attention to the here and now.

Begin to inspect the raisin with your sense of sight. Hold the raisin up in your hand. Take a good, slow, long look at it. What do you notice about what this raisin looks like? What do you notice about its color? Its texture? Does it look different depending on the angle or the light? Take your time looking at the raisin; there's no need to rush.

Now, examine the raisin with your sense of touch. Roll it between your thumb and your index finger, squeeze it gently, or rub it slowly. What do you notice? How does the raisin feel? Is it warm or cool? Firm or soft? Again, take your time examining the raisin in detail, with great curiosity.

If all this seems a bit silly, that's okay. This is just an experiment. You can approach it with a sense of playfulness. Even though your mom may have told you when you were little not to play with your food, for now it's okay.

Now, examine the raisin with your sense of smell. Hold it up to your nose, close your eyes, and gently breathe in through your nostrils. What do you notice? Do you smell anything? Is it a faint smell, or a strong smell? Is it sweet, or is it bitter?

Next, examine the raisin with your sense of hearing. Hold the raisin up to one ear. Give it a gentle squeeze, or roll it between your thumb and your index finger. Do you hear anything? Remember, this is the first time you have touched a raisin, so you don't know what to expect. Just be curious, and be open to whatever you experience, letting go of any expectations.

After listening to the raisin for a minute or two, place the raisin in your mouth, on the middle of your tongue. If you notice the urge to chew or swallow, try to just notice that urge, without acting on it right away. As the raisin sits on your tongue, roll it around your mouth, from front to back and side to side. What do you notice about the texture of the raisin as you roll it around in your mouth? Do you notice your mouth or body responding in any way to the presence of this raisin in your mouth? You can put the book down and close your eyes for a minute or two while you do this.

Now, gently bite down on the raisin. Chew it very slowly, with purpose and care, paying close attention to every detail of taste, sensation, and texture as you chew. Take your time, slowly chewing the raisin until it dissolves. What does it taste like? What is happening to the texture, the consistency, of the raisin? You can put the book down for this part too and close your eyes as you chew the raisin.

If a thought like I don't like raisins or *This doesn't taste good* enters your mind, just notice you are having a judgmental thought. Then, as best you can, bring your attention back to the pure sensory experience of the raisin in your mouth.

When the raisin is almost completely dissolved, go ahead and slowly—intentionally—swallow it. Notice what it feels like as the raisin goes down your throat, toward your stomach.

After the raisin is gone, pause and take a moment to thank yourself for eating a raisin mindfully. Thanking yourself is a way to practice self-compassion, which is an essential ingredient in mindfulness practice.

Here are a few questions to reflect on after eating a raisin mindfully:

1. What did you notice while eating the raisin and paying very close attention? I don't mean what did you *think* about the raisin. I mean, what did you *experience directly*, with your senses of sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste?
2. How is what you just did any different from the way you would normally eat a raisin?
3. What could eating a raisin slowly and carefully possibly have to do with managing stress?

Personally, I have a tendency to eat raisins quickly—usually in my cereal—without thinking about it. When I eat a raisin slowly and mindfully, I notice many things that I don't normally notice. I notice that different parts of the raisin might be different colors. I'm surprised by the little squeaky noise when I squeeze it next to my ear. I notice how much taste and flavor a single raisin has. I am surprised at how enjoyable eating a raisin can be, even though usually I think that I don't "like" raisins (and haven't, ever since I was a little kid!).

Perhaps you've eaten thousands of raisins. You might normally eat raisins on autopilot—just going through the motions, while your mind is somewhere else. When you take time to slow down and intentionally pay attention to something so simple, your experience can become richer, fuller, more alive—more flavorful. Perhaps even more delicious!

You can shift out of autopilot and into present-moment awareness while eating a raisin, while sitting quietly and focusing on your breath, or while doing

almost any other activity. When you pay attention with curiosity and open-hearted awareness, you will begin to free yourself from your own judgments and expectations. You will experience life *just as it is*, moment to moment. This can be profoundly liberating, helping you free yourself from stress.

The Many Definitions of Mindfulness

Asking someone to define mindfulness is kind of like asking, “What does chocolate taste like?” Or “What does your favorite song sound like?” Definitions can only give you a small

idea of the real experience. Just reading about mindfulness without experiencing it yourself is like going to a restaurant to read the menu, without tasting any of the food. Just as the point of going to a restaurant is to taste the food, the point of mindfulness is to actually experience it.

That said, there are some descriptions of mindfulness that might be a good place to start. Jon Kabat-Zinn’s definition of mindfulness as “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally” is simple and to the point. Mindfulness is all about paying attention to the present moment. Mindfulness is about shifting out of autopilot and awakening to the here and now. Mindfulness is about freeing yourself from regrets about the past and worries about the future.

Here are a few other ways of describing mindfulness:

- “Being present”
- “Awareness”
- “Awakening”
- “Concentration plus attention”
- “Seeing clearly”
- “Compassionate awareness”
- “Openheartedness”
- “Loving presence”

People in every culture around the world have recognized the wisdom of openhearted, present-moment awareness, whether or not they called it “mindfulness,” for thousands of years. Everyone can be mindful. You have probably already experienced moments of natural mindfulness. Perhaps you’ve had times, without even trying to, when you were deeply aware of what you were doing; the only thing that mattered was the present moment—the past and the future seemed to disappear—and you were filled with gratitude for being alive. Maybe this happens for you when you play sports. Or maybe you experience this kind of awareness when you play a musical instrument, when you pet your dog or cat gently, or when you listen to your favorite song. Whether you realized it or not in those moments, you already know how to be mindful!

Breathing: The Heart of Mindfulness

You breathe in and out about twenty thousand times a day. How many of those breaths are you consciously aware of? How many of those breaths do you really enjoy? If you’re like most people, the answer is “not many.” The foundation of all mindfulness practices is to bring your awareness to your breath. This is also known as “coming back to your breath.” Your breath is a wonderful gift that brings your mind and body together in the here and now. You can start to bring yourself back to the present moment, and begin to free yourself from stress, with as few as three mindful breaths. Right here. Right now. Give it a try.

Try This! Mindful Breathing

You can do this mindfulness practice using the instructions below or with the help of the recording (track 2) available at <http://www.newharbinger.com/30802>. I recommend that you start by following along with the recording a few times. Then, try guiding yourself through the practice, without the recording, just to see what that’s like.

First, stop. Stop whatever you are doing, or whatever it is that you were about to do, and simply allow yourself to be “here,” without needing to do anything.

Next, simply bring your attention to your breath, just as it is, in the here and now. You don’t need to make your breath any different than it naturally is. You don’t have to make it slower or deeper. Just bring your attention to your natural breath, with an attitude of curiosity and kindness. Notice the movement of the air as you breathe in, inhaling oxygen, and as you breathe out, exhaling carbon dioxide.

Experiment with saying silently to yourself as you breathe in and out, *Breathing in, I know that I am breathing in. Breathing out, I know that I am breathing out* (Nhat Hanh 2009, 4). Or, you can shorten this to *In. Out.*

Pay careful attention to your breath, following it as you breathe in and out. Notice the beginning of your in-breath. Follow your in-breath from the beginning, to the middle, all the way to the end. Then notice the pause between your in-breath and your out-breath. Follow your out-breath from the beginning, to the middle, all the way to the end.

You might want to imagine that you are floating in the ocean and each breath is a wave passing beneath you. Each in-breath lifts you up, and each out-breath sets you back down. Just float gently on the waves of your breath. It might also help to focus on the part of your body where you notice your breath most easily, like your nose—where you can feel the air going in and out—or your belly, which expands and contracts with each breath.

Following your breath doesn’t have to feel like work. Breathing mindfully can be relaxing and enjoyable. If your breath feels good, simply enjoy the sensation and smile.

If your mind wanders or if you get distracted, that’s okay. That’s what minds do. Don’t judge yourself as having done something “wrong.” You can just notice and gently say to yourself, *Oh, my mind has wandered off*, and perhaps be curious about where your mind wandered off to. Then gently bring your attention back to the next breath.

You can breathe mindfully like this for three breaths, nine breaths, or, if you have time, two or three minutes.

What was it like to pay attention to your breath? What was it like to come back to the present moment? Did you notice anything interesting or surprising?

You can take some time to do mindful breathing any time of day, anywhere. After breathing mindfully for a few breaths or a few minutes, continue to go about your day, more connected to the present moment. See whether coming back to your breath changes your day in any way. Your breath is always there for you, to keep you alive and nourish your body and your mind. Can you learn to be there for your breath?

[Go here if you want to learn more about *The Mindful Teen* by Dzung X. Vo, MD, FAAP.](#)

Skill #3: Develop a Positive Self-Image, from *The Self-Esteem Workbook for Teens* by Lisa M. Schab, LCSW

It doesn't matter who you are, where you have been, or what path you have taken. It doesn't matter what you have done or not done, said or not said, thought or not thought. Today, right now, you have positive qualities. Discovering them, acknowledging them, and embracing them are steps toward healthy self-esteem.

* *Maya's Story*

Maya's life seemed to get worse every day. Her classes were too hard this year; she couldn't keep up. Her best friend rarely talked to her anymore; she felt lonely. Her brother had won yet another award; she would never be as talented as he was. And last week she had been caught shoplifting some makeup. The store manager didn't press charges because he knew her family, but he did call her parents to tell them. Maya felt like such a loser, like she didn't fit in anywhere.

When her dad knocked on her bedroom door that day, Maya cringed. Here comes a lecture, she thought. And I'll be grounded for life. But Maya's dad didn't ground her.

He said that he was worried. He said that Maya was really hard on herself, and that he often heard her put herself down. Maya's dad told her she deserved to celebrate all the wonderful things about herself instead of always focusing on the things she didn't like.

"But there is nothing good about me," said Maya. "All I do is mess up over and over again."

"If that's what you want to believe, you'll never be happy," her dad

said. "Do you ever think about what a good artist you are or how much your mom and I love you? About your friends who have stuck by you since grade school? About why the Meyers ask you to babysit so often or how helpful you are to Mom when she has to work weekends? You have wonderful, positive qualities, Maya. You just don't see them because you're so busy focusing on what you don't like about yourself."

Try This

Describe a time when you may have felt like Maya did. What was going on in your life?

Person after person can point out your positive qualities, but no one can make you believe. Deciding what you will focus on about yourself is your choice. Describe how you feel when you focus on things you don't like about yourself.

Describe how you feel when you focus on things you do like about yourself.

Sometimes our brains play tricks and try to tell us that our positives aren't real or that someone who gives us a compliment is lying. Does this ever happen to you? If so, give an example.

Think about deciding which of your thoughts you will choose to believe. Would you consider changing from focusing on the things you don't like about yourself to the things you do like? Tell why or why not.

Now Try This

Positives aren't all about what you win or achieve. They are also about what you attempt, what you think, and who you are. Just reading this book is a positive. It means you are willing to try something new. It means you have hope and courage and are open to change.

Circle any of the following positives that are true about you.

good listener

hardworking

kind to animals

kind to people

good sense of humor

loving

patient

responsible

sincere

honest reliable smart

clean

good friend brave

loyal

talented at a hobby

talented at a sport

Give examples of each of the positives you circled; for example, if you circled "patient," describe a specific time when you expressed patience, or tell about the circumstances when you usually notice yourself acting with patience.

Ask three or more people what they would name as your positives and record their answers below.

[Go here if you want to learn more about *The Self-Esteem Workbook for Teens* by Lisa M. Schab, LCSW.](#)

Skill #4: See the Positive, from *Don't Let Your Emotions Run Your Life for Teens* by Sheri Van Dijk, MSW

Have you ever noticed that when you feel down, angry, anxious, or have other painful emotions, all you can think about are the negative things in your life? It's almost like you're wearing blinders that prevent you from seeing anything positive. And often, when there is something positive, you are able to find a way to minimize it so that it still feeds into your negative outlook.

You might have heard the expression "looking at the world through rose-colored glasses," referring to people who have a positive outlook or who are perceived as overly optimistic. Well, the same is true for people who have a negative outlook or are pessimistic—you could say they're wearing dark glasses that tint everything they see.

Your mood obviously has a big impact on the way you see things. When you feel happier, you can see the more positive things in your life for what they are. When you're feeling more down, you tend to focus on the negative. This activity is about taking off those dark glasses and focusing more on the positive things in your life, in spite of how you're feeling.

For the next two weeks, fill out the chart on the following page, noting at least one positive event that happens every single day and your thoughts and emotions about that event. It could be a feeling you experience; something kind that someone does or says to you (or that you do or say to someone else!); it could be a beautiful sunrise; a good mark you get at school; or a peaceful, relaxing time you have as you sit in your backyard with your dog in the sunshine. It doesn't matter what it is; what does matter is that you notice that it's happening.

After you've completed your fourteen days of charting, you might find it helpful to make a point of continuing to notice these positive things as they happen.

[illegible]

[Go here if you want to learn more about *Don't Let Your Emotions Run Your Life for Teens* by Sheri Van Dijk, MSW.](#)

** Bonus Exercise*

More on Seeing the Positive,

from *The Anxiety Workbook for Teens*
by Lisa M. Schab, LCSW

Tristan and Jon were training for their school's big cross-country meet. They decided to meet at the field house at noon on Saturday to run a ten-mile course through the surrounding neighborhoods. Saturday turned out to be the hottest, most humid day of the summer. The boys laid out their course and then started off. About one-third of the way through, both boys were really feeling the heat, but they didn't want to stop because they needed the training. They kept running, getting hotter and thirstier with every step. By the time they were two-thirds of the way through, all that either of them could think about was a cool drink of water. When they finally hit the last stretch, they were hotter than ever and their clothes were drenched with sweat. Upon reaching the school, they both ran straight for the drinking fountain, only to find that it wasn't working. There was no drinking water at all except for a half-full water bottle sitting next to the fountain. Tristan had left it there before they started their run. Both boys looked at the same water bottle, and both had different reactions.

Tristan said, "Oh man! I am so glad I left this water bottle here! It's just half full, but that's better than nothing! Gee, are we lucky to have this!" Tristan's attitude made him feel peaceful.

Jon looked at the very same water bottle and said, "Oh no! I can't believe this is all we have! This is terrible! I could drink ten full bottles myself, and all we have is a half of one!" Jon's attitude made him feel anxious.

Each boy was in the same situation, but each experienced it very differently having nothing to do with the situation itself. Their experiences came from within each of them—from their attitudes.

Directions

In each pair of pictures below, two young people are in the same situation, but you can tell by the looks on their faces that they are experiencing it differently. Under the pictures, write what each person might be thinking to cause their individual feelings.









More to Do

Describe a recent situation in which you experienced anxiety.

Tell what you were thinking that caused this anxiety.

What could you have thought to make the experience a peaceful one instead?

Describe a recent situation in which you felt peaceful.

Tell what you were thinking that caused you to feel peaceful.

What could you have thought that would have made the experience an anxious one instead?

Read over the two situations you just wrote about. If possible, share them with another person. Think and talk about the awesome power of your attitude to affect how you experience life.

As you go through the upcoming days, notice how your attitude about anything that happens affects your anxiety level.

[Go here if you want to learn more about *The Anxiety Workbook for Teens* by Lisa M. Schab, LCSW.](#)

Skill #5: Be Assertive, from *Relationship Skills 101 for Teens* by Sheri Van Dijk, MSW

Assertiveness is a gigantic topic, but I'll do my best to cover the basics for you here. If you decide that you really have difficulty being assertive, you may want to look into taking a class on assertiveness, or joining a support group. Have patience with yourself, though, because it usually takes lots of time and practice to change the patterns you've been stuck in for most of your life.

Remembering that you have to increase your awareness of something before you can change it, start by using your mindfulness skills to help you notice when you're not being assertive. For example, you might notice that you're starting to feel an uncomfortable emotion; tuning in to this, you may find you're starting to feel resentful because you're not speaking up about your preference in a situation.

Assertiveness is also connected to self-esteem. If you don't feel good about who you are as a person, it's more difficult to be assertive because you may not feel like you deserve what you're asking for. However, it also works the other way: the more you assert yourself, the more you'll increase your self-esteem, so don't give up on assertiveness just because you think it's doomed from the start!

Asserting yourself is a healthy way of living your life. You have the right to express your emotions, opinions, and beliefs—and of course, others have the right to disagree with your opinions and beliefs!

For the purposes of this section of the book, we'll be looking at assertiveness only as it applies in two types of situations. The first is when you're asking someone for something. For example, you ask your parents if you can go to a friend's cottage this weekend, or you ask your sister to give

you extra time on the family computer tonight because you've got an assignment due tomorrow. In these situations, someone has something you want, and assertiveness will increase your chances of getting it.

The second type of situation is when someone asks you for something, and you want to say no to that request. Saying no can be difficult—again, if you have low self-esteem you may not feel that you deserve to say no, or you may feel obligated to say yes because of who is making the request. You may not feel you're able to say no to a teacher, for example, because he has a degree of power over you. Sometimes you might worry that if you say no to a friend he'll be angry with you or decide not to be your friend anymore (a concern also related to low self-esteem). Tied into this, you might be a person who avoids conflict at all costs, and so you feel you can't say no because that might lead to an argument. Sometimes people just feel guilty for saying no, and so they say yes to avoid feeling an uncomfortable emotion.

Whether you're making a request of someone or saying no to someone else's request, being assertive means communicating your emotions, thoughts, and beliefs in a way that's clear, but also respectful to both you and the other person. It involves caring about the other person and his needs, which means that negotiation and compromise often come into play as you try to get your own needs met, as well as to meet the needs of the other person. Here are some guidelines to help you increase your assertive communication.

Be Clear About Your Goals

Often what gets in the way of people getting what they want is their own indecisiveness—they're not entirely clear on what their goals are. If you're not clear on what you want in a situation, how on earth can you expect the other person to be clear about it? In an interpersonal situation, our primary goals might relate to three areas: the outcome, the relationship, or our own self-respect.

Outcome

When your priority in a situation is to get something from someone (for example, to borrow money from your parents), or to say no to another person's request (for example, to skip a concert your boyfriend wants you to go to), your goal relates to the outcome. In other words, your main concern is getting what you want, or saying no to what someone else wants.

Relationship

So what you want in the situation is to borrow some money from your parents, or maybe to tell your boyfriend you don't want to go to the concert he's asked you to—you have an outcome you'd like to achieve. But maybe in this situation, you're less concerned with whether you get what you want, and more concerned with maintaining your connection with the others involved. If so, your goal here relates to the relationship.

Self-Respect

Maybe you'd like to get your needs met, but what's even more important to you in the situations you find yourself in is that you feel good about yourself for the way you interacted when all is said and done. Even if you don't actually get your needs met (your parents won't lend you money, or your boyfriend isn't taking no for an answer because he's already bought the concert tickets), as long as you come out of the situation feeling good about yourself for the way you behaved, you've met your goal—even if a relationship has to change or end as a result.

One final note here about self-respect, since it's obviously a pretty important goal that we want to work on as often as possible. In an ideal world, you'd feel good about yourself every time you engage with others, but unfortunately it doesn't always work that way. Sometimes you might choose to sacrifice self-respect a bit for the sake of the outcome or the relationship.

Let's take a look at an example: We know that Rebecca and her mother have really been struggling to get along with each other, and that Rebecca, at least, is now trying really hard to change this. Early one Saturday morning, Rebecca's mother comes to her bedroom door and asks Rebecca to go grocery shopping with her. This is certainly not something Rebecca feels like getting up early for on a Saturday morning! But knowing how rocky things have been with her mom lately, Rebecca doesn't feel like she can say no to this request. Her goal here is to continue to improve her relationship with her mother, and that means, in this instance, sacrificing a bit of her self-respect, as she does what her mother asks instead of sleeping in as she herself wants to.

Obviously Rebecca isn't behaving toward her mother in a way that she'll later regret, but there is a part of her that likely is wishing she didn't have to give in to this request, and that she could be more assertive; in this way, her self-respect will suffer a little. If Rebecca made these kinds of choices on a regular basis, this would become a problem and her self-respect would begin to decrease. But there's likely also a part of Rebecca that feels good about making the choice to help her mother on this occasion, which helps us see that this issue is not cut-and-dried! The bottom line is, the more you can behave in ways that don't reduce your self-respect, the better; but sometimes you may find you have to sacrifice self-respect—hopefully just in small ways, as in Rebecca's example—in order to achieve the outcome you want or to improve your connection with another person.

Keeping these three possible goal areas in mind, it's important to figure out which one is most important to you in any given situation. Sometimes, we run into an ideal situation where it is possible to reach our goals in all three areas—we get what we want (or say no), we maintain a good relationship with the other person, and we feel good about ourselves for our behavior. But unfortunately, you might more often find yourself in situations where it's not possible to come out meeting all three of these goals. When this happens, you need to be clear in your own mind about what's most important for you in that situation: to get what you're asking for or to stick to your no, to preserve the relationship, or to respect yourself after

the interaction. Keeping this in the front of your mind as you proceed with the interaction, try to act in ways that will make it more likely that you'll achieve this result.

How to Be Assertive

Now that you've decided what goal area you'll be focusing on in the situation, you can use the method I'll outline in this section to help you communicate assertively. Unfortunately, these steps don't come with guarantees—when you're dealing with another person, you might not get what you want no matter how skillfully you act. Using these steps, though, will make it more likely you'll reach your goals.

I'll run through the steps first, and then we'll look at some examples to help you understand more fully how to apply them.

Describe the situation.

When you're being assertive, it's very helpful to describe, factually, the situation you're referring to so that everyone's clear on what's being discussed. It's also important to pay close attention to the language you're using. As best as you can, stick to factual, descriptive language rather than using judgments.

State your opinion and emotions.

Without blaming or judging, tell the other person your thoughts, and, if applicable, your emotions about the situation you've just described.

Clearly state what you want.

This is where you get very specific about what you're asking for (or, in the case of someone else's request, that you're saying no). Don't be shy—come

out and say it! And make sure your request is clear—people often make an observation and then expect the other person to read their minds about what they would like. For example, your mom might mention, “There are a lot of dishes to be done tonight and it’s late.” From this statement, you might surmise that she’s asking you to help with the dishes, but she hasn’t actually made the request. It’s much better to have a request out in the open so it can be discussed, rather than getting stuck in old patterns like giving each other the silent treatment. Talking about it will help you know where you stand.

Reinforce.

It’s often helpful if you provide incentive for others to give you what you’re asking for; for example, if your parents lend you the car, you’ll fill it back up with gas and you’ll even wash it this weekend. This way, they will be more likely to want to help, not necessarily because they’re getting something out of it, but because they see your willingness to compromise and negotiate.

Since I’ve thrown a lot at you here, let’s put all of these steps together with some examples.

Carter Asserts Himself with His Girlfriend

Carter’s already lost some good friends in his band, and he certainly doesn’t want to lose his girlfriend as well. Merrin has already made it clear that he has to change his ways or she’s done, so he’s trying to be more assertive rather than letting his anger control him. He wants to talk to Merrin about her threat to leave so she knows he’s taking it seriously. Here’s an example of how Carter might speak with Merrin:

(Describing the situation) You’ve told me that you’re ready to end our relationship if I can’t get my anger under control. **(Stating opinions and**

emotions) I don't like the thought of losing you; it terrifies me, and it also hurts me to know I've hurt you so much. **(Clearly stating what he wants)** I'd like it if you could help me manage my anger by pointing out to me when you see it start to rise; I'm working on doing this myself, but it's hard.

(Reinforcing) I'd really appreciate it if you could help me with this, and it just might save our relationship.

Here you can see Carter incorporating all four steps in what he's saying to Merrin. He's not judging her or blaming her for the situation. By describing the situation, he makes sure they both know what's being discussed, and Merrin has an opportunity to correct any errors in Carter's perceptions. He's very clear about what he's asking Merrin to help him with, and the reinforcer is both his appreciation and the fact that it might help their relationship. This is assertive communication!

Rebecca Asserts Herself with Her Mom

Rebecca has been feeling neglected by her mom, who had always made her a priority until she became involved with her new boyfriend, Tom. Following is how an assertive conversation might start with Rebecca asking her mom to spend more time with her.

(Describing the situation) You've been spending a lot of time with Tom recently, which means we haven't been spending as much time together as we used to. **(Stating opinions and emotions)** I really miss spending time with you, and I've been feeling very alone. **(Clearly stating what she wants)** I'd really like it if we could spend the weekend together, just the two of us. **(Reinforcing)** I think it would help us reconnect, and it would make me feel better.

Again, you see here that Rebecca just describes the situation, matter-of-factly and without blaming her mother. Although she doesn't state an opinion, she's clear about her emotions.

She assertively asks for what she'd like: to spend the weekend together. And the reinforcers are that it's going to be good for their relationship and help Rebecca feel better. It's clear, it's straightforward, it's assertive!

Keeping in mind that Rebecca and Carter might not get what they're asking for, I hope you can see that even if that's the case, they haven't done any further damage to their relationships, and they're likely to feel good about the way they've interacted with the people they needed to communicate with, which will increase their self-respect.

[Go here if you want to learn more about Relationship Skills 101 for Teens](#) by Sheri Van Dijk, MSW

Skill #6: Live your Values,

from *Get out of Your Mind and Into Your Life for Teens*
by Joseph V. Ciarrochi, PhD, Louise Hayes, PhD,
and Ann Bailey, MD

Living your values means listening to what's important to you and choosing to act accordingly. It means saying, "I stand for this," "I care about this," or "I want to be about doing this." It can take some detective work to figure out what really matters to you and some courage to put your values into action, but it's worth the effort. After all, it's better than being at the mercy of the dice.

We think a lot of people never realize that they get to choose how to decide on actions that reflect their values. And, of course, a lot of teenagers complain that the adults in their lives don't let them choose. That isn't what you'll get from us. We want you to know that you *do* have choices, and we want to help you explore them. That's the only way you can figure out what living your values means for you—just for you, not for your parents, your teachers, or your friends.

That probably sounds pretty good. But we have to warn you about a few things: Thinking about choices can bring up a lot of uncomfortable feelings. Plus, the mind has a tendency to go into overdrive and start evaluating how you aren't doing enough in your life or how you aren't good enough to have friendship or love. And at this point in the book, you have learned what happens when all those evaluations start coming up in your mind. It can get pretty unpleasant. So be sure to put your mindful warrior skills to work. Notice that thinking about important issues often feels uncomfortable. That's when you need to be especially willing to use **BOLD** skills and keep following the path that matters to you.

Exercise: Getting a Glimpse of Values

In this exercise, you'll get some practice in deciding on actions in some imaginary situations. It's sort of like a workout in choosing your values. Since it's imaginary, we're giving you some pretty wild scenarios. Write as many answers to each question as you'd like. If you need more space, you can use a separate piece of paper or your journal.

What would you do if you had more money than you could possibly spend?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

It would be fun, wouldn't it? If you're like most people, you may have imagined yourself in a fancy house with a pool, owning several expensive cars, going to all the best restaurants, traveling the world, and basically having everything you could possibly desire. Great!

Now imagine that you've bought everything you wanted, traveled the world, had some adventures, and maybe even bought an island. Who knows?

Maybe you're even a little bit sick of buying things. What would you do with your life next? For example, maybe you'd work to help other teenagers in need, do something creative, or spend a lot of time with family members, friends, or loved ones. Write your ideas about what you'd do here, and use a separate piece of paper or your journal if you need more space:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

Now look over your answers to those two questions. Does it maybe seem like being rich would be great, but what you do with your life matters even more than what you own?

Your answers to the second question, about what you'd do after you get tired of spending money, go a long way toward revealing what you value. Why did you choose the things you listed in response to the second question? We hope the answer is because they mean something to you—because they're important and have a great deal of value for you.

Daring to Dream

Civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. once said, “If you lose hope, somehow you lose the vitality that keeps life moving, you lose that courage to be, that quality that helps you go on in spite of it all. And so today I still have a dream.” We think most people—you included—have a lot in common with Martin Luther King Jr. Most people have big dreams. The key is to think about them and use them to guide your life’s course, almost like a compass pointing you in the direction that matters in your life. Here’s an exercise to help you do just that.

Exercise: Daring to Dream

Imagine that someone is standing in front of you—someone who really cares about you and wants to know what’s important to you. Imagine that this person is intensely interested in your opinions. Answer the following questions as though you were speaking to that person. Don’t hold back. This is your chance to share your thoughts with someone who really wants to listen!

As you answer, watch out for your mind giving you bad advice. For example, it might say that you can’t achieve your biggest dreams. The mind is almost always critical when people dare to dream. Just observe this and dare to dream anyway. Also think back and consider the six choices you made in the previous exercise. Playing with them can help you think of what matters here too.

If you had a magic wand and could change something about the world, what would you change? Jot down the first three ideas you think of:

1.
2.
3.

Choose the idea you like the most and write it here:

Now think about this: What qualities are important in a good friendship?
Once again, jot down the first three things that pop into your head:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Now seriously consider what you think the most important quality in a friend is and write it here:

Finally, if you were given a chance to achieve something amazing with your life, what would you choose to do? Don't hold back; there are no limits here! Since this is an exercise in dreaming, write down as many amazing things as you like. If you need more space, use a separate piece of paper or your journal.

1.
2.
3.
4.

5. _____

6. _____

How did it go? It takes a lot of courage to even think about these questions. We're guessing that your mind had a lot to say. It can feel scary or wrong to boldly write something like "I'd like to create more love in the world," "I'd like to be a good friend who listens," or "I want to be a best-selling author." Maybe your mind offered some evaluations, perhaps with thoughts like *This exercise is silly*. Or maybe it tried to convince you that you're just not up to realizing your dreams, focusing on limitations and saying things like *I could never do that because...* This may not be fun, but as you now know, it's normal. Whatever thoughts you had are fine.

You may not think any of your dreams are realistic or possible for you. That's okay. A lot of the teenagers we've met think the same thing, and we used to think that way too. Jess definitely does. Let's take a look at what happened when she did this exercise—and how she used BOLD warrior skills to work with her mind's resistance.

Jess: Daring to Dream

What would I do if I had a magic wand and could change something about the world?

1. I'd stop pollution.
2. I'd make people nicer to each other.
3. I'd end poverty.

Out of these ideas, the one I like best is stopping pollution.

As to what qualities are important in a good friendship, I definitely learned a few things about that back when my former best friend, Sally, started spreading rumors about Josh and me. Here are my three ideas:

1. Being able to trust each other
2. Being able to have fun and laugh together
3. Doing nice things for each other, like helping with homework

Out of these qualities, the one that seems most important is being able to trust each other.

Even though it might not seem like it now, I actually have a lot of ideas about amazing things I'd like to do in life (if I had a magic wand, that is):

1. Be a chef with my own restaurant
2. Find the love of my life and share amazing times
3. Travel the world, experiencing new cultures and having adventures
4. Learn about food from all over the world and then share my passion with friend
5. Protest about pollution and help politicians hear how much people care about this

6. Eat well and exercise so I look amazingly hot

7. Have a family (Wow, that is weird! But I want to do that some day.)

But even as I write that list, I can hear my mind at work, telling me that I'm pretty dumb to think I can do any of these things. After all, I'm just a teenage loser with no friends and no life. Me, a chef—ha! I'll probably end up working in a factory chopping heads off fish all day. In fact, I'll be lucky if anyone ever hires me, so I should just be satisfied with a boring, dead-end job, if I can even get one.

*You know, when I do the mindful warrior thing, I can notice my mind is really working overtime here. I guess that makes it a good time to try some BOLD skills.¹ I'll start by just **breathing** deeply and noticing what my mind is saying.*

*The next thing is to **observe**. I can see problem finding (I'm dumb; I'm a loser) and I can see my mind trying to convince me (I should be satisfied with a dead-end job). Okay, not bad observations, I guess.*

Since I really can't run from my mind machine (I wouldn't get far, LOL!), I'll just observe the thoughts and add that saying at the front so I can observe them even better. Here goes:

I'm having the thought that I've ruined my life.

I'm having the thought that nothing good will ever happen to me.

I'm having the thought that I deserve a boring, dead-end job and a boring, dead-end life.

I'm having the thought that...Wow! my mind does this negative stuff all the time!

I guess I'm noticing that wise view thing.² I am not my evaluations!

*Now I need to **listen** to what I care about—my values. Okay, so my value is to have a future with a career like being a chef and to have friends right now. That's it for now.*

1. BOLD thinking is a technique explained fully in *Get out of Your Mind and into Your Life for Teens*. It stands for breath, observe, listen, decide.

2. Wise view is a method of noticing your thoughts, feelings, and experiences without becoming attached to them. It is described fully in *Get out of Your Mind and into Your Life for Teens*.

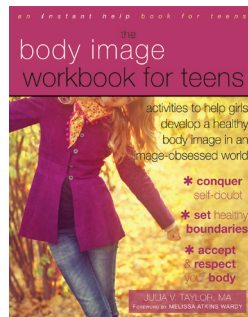
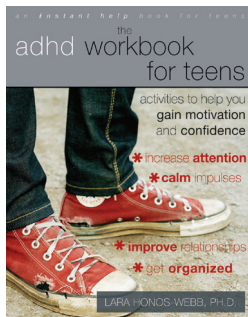
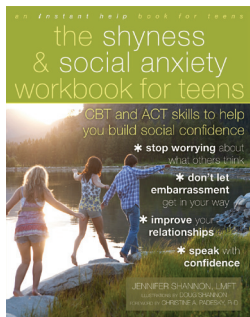
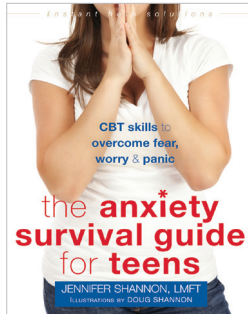
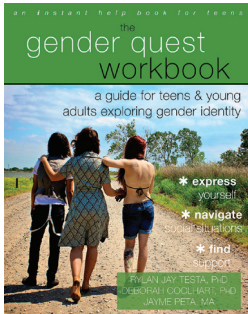
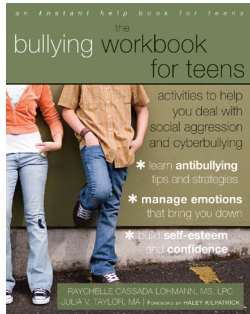
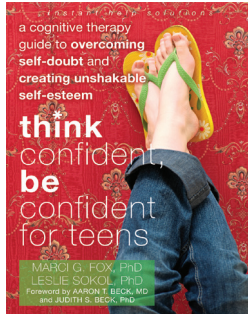
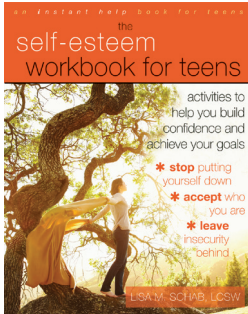
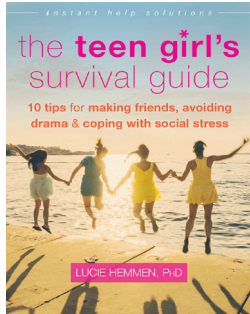
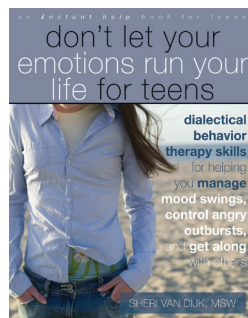
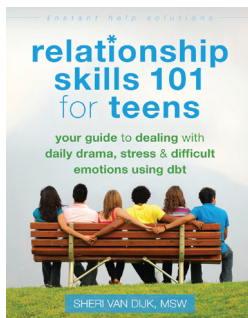
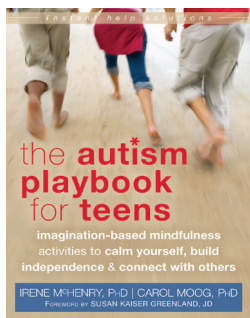
*The last part of BOLD is to **decide** on actions and then take them. So my decision is to practice mindful warrior skills and get into wise view, where I can see that I am not my evaluations. And I've also decided to keep being willing to dream, even if I'm really scared.*

The Wrap Up

Learning to live your values is about being willing to dream and discover. Sure, you have to act on them, but the starting place is thinking about your dreams, even if you feel uncertain or scared.

Your problem-finding mind will probably try to discourage you from dreaming. It will tell you that your dreams can't happen—that they're too big or too grand. We don't guarantee that you can achieve your dreams. But one thing is for sure: they're not likely to happen if you don't know what they are. Daring to have big dreams is one of the best ways to discover what you love, what you care about, and what you want to stand for.

[Go here if you want to learn more about Get out of Your Mind and into Your Life for Teens](#) by Joseph V. Ciarrochi, PhD, Louise Hayes, PhD, and Ann Bailey, MD.



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